

5. A PIED HARRIER (*CIRCUS MELANOLEUCOS*) ROOST IN SOHAGI-BARWA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, MAHARAJGANJ, UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA

On March 23, 1998 while surveying the grasslands of Sohagi-Barwa Wildlife Sanctuary (27° 10' to 27° 20' N & 83° 35' to 83° 50' E) in Uttar Pradesh, I came across a roost of pied harrier *Circus melanoleucos*, in what was possibly the largest number ever reported from India.

As I was moving through the Nagwa grasslands I saw two male pied harriers on the ground, about 50 m from Mankapur-Madhualia road. It was 1730 hrs when I saw the first two birds and as I stopped to scan the area more birds descended on the same patch. I counted 20 birds, 3 females and 17 males. The birds I saw were mostly close to the road, in patches where the grass had been cut, and those which landed while I was scanning the area. Although the grass had been cut, it was tall enough to hide these birds, and I suspect the harrier numbers to be much higher, probably around 50 birds.

The grasslands of Mankapur Beat in Nagwa Compartment 16 (Madhualia Range) are among the largest blocks of grasslands in the entire Sohagi-Barwa Sanctuary and are in continuation with the Ghanshyampur grasslands of South Chowk Range.

The pied harrier is a winter visitor to the eastern parts of the Indian subcontinent, quite common in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Manipur, Assam (where it occasionally breeds), West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and decreasingly so down the eastern side of the Peninsula and in small numbers to Sri Lanka, occasionally in Kerala, Nilgiri and Palni Hills in Tamil Nadu (HANDBOOK, Ali and Ripley 1987). It has been reported from eastern districts (Balghat and Bhandara) and northwest Madhya Pradesh (Rahmani 1988). Vyas (1992) has reported this species from southeast Rajasthan. Rare stragglers or vagrants have been seen in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. It is not recorded north of Bombay

in western India, and west of the Nepal terai and Gorakhpur district in Uttar Pradesh. In Dudwa National Park, Uttar Pradesh, a few birds have been seen regularly in the Madrayya region in the last few years and near Dudwa at Kishanpur, Katerniaghat and Pilibhit region.

These birds affect open grass patches, hills (to c. 2,100 m – Kodaikanal), paddy fields, stubbles and grassy margins of *jheels* (natural water bodies). Though mainly extralimital in breeding, they occasionally breed in Assam (Dibrugarh district – Kaziranga). Narayan and Lima (1991) have reported breeding of pied harriers in Manas Wildlife Sanctuary and suspect at least three breeding pairs. They also believe that a few of these birds breed regularly in the alluvial grasslands south of the Himalayas and north of the Brahmaputra in lower Assam, and possibly on islands and the southern bank of the river in Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Burachapuri and Kochmara reserves, Kaziranga National Park and Majuli Is.

The pied harrier roost in Sohagi-Barwa Wildlife Sanctuary is important on three counts. First, it is the largest reported in India, secondly it is further west of the reported range in Assam, and thirdly the roost was found in a disturbed grassland where grazing and grass cutting was frequent. As pied harriers are an important species of these alluvial grasslands, it is essential to give high priority to the protection of these grasslands. To protect pied harriers and other such typical grassland fauna, grazing and cutting should be checked.

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6. THE GREYHEADED LAPWING, *VANELLUS CINEREUS* (BLYTH) IN KALIVELI TANK, TAMIL NADU

On January 25, 1997, I was surveying water birds in Kaliveli Tank, a brackish wetland on the east coast in Tamil Nadu (12° 05'-12° 15' N, 79° 47'-79° 59' E). In the midst of two curlews, *Numenius arquata*, and five large egrets, *Ardea alba*, there was a grey headed wading bird which struck me as unusual. I approached closer, wading into the slush and watched with my binoculars at a distance of about 20 m. It was a greyheaded lapwing, *Vanellus cinereus* (Blyth). I watched the bird feeding for two minutes and edged closer, whereupon it took off and settled about 100 m away. I watched it for some time and then tried to see if there were other individuals of the species. It was a lone bird, and after half an hour, flew away silently. The bird was distinguished from other lapwings by the completely smoke-grey head and neck; yellow beak and wattle. The primaries were black and the tail feathers had a broad black subterminal band. In flight, the bird spread out its tail feathers. It was a juvenile, as the dark pectoral band of the adults was missing (Ali and Ripley 1980).

This species is known to be a regular winter visitor, from September-October to March-April, to India in Assam, Manipur, North Bihar, Dehra Dun, Rajasthan and the Andaman Islands, as well as several places in 'East India' (Ali and Ripley 1980). Subramanya (1987) has recorded this species from Bangalore. This sighting is the second record for the species in peninsular India. The bird was probably a vagrant, since I had not seen it during my survey of the region in 1995-96, nor did I record it in 1998. Perennou (1987) and Perennou and Santharam (1990) have conducted detailed ornithological surveys in this region and have not come across this species.

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